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Commission on the Status of Women
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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls

Ministerial round tables: good practices in the empowerment of rural women and girls, including through the prevention of gender-based violence and the promotion of access to justice, social services and health care

Chairs' summary

1. On 12 March 2018, the Commission on the Status of Women held two ministerial round tables on the topic "Good practices in the empowerment of rural women and girls, including through the prevention of gender-based violence and the promotion of access to justice, social services and health care" under the priority theme "Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls". The participants in the round tables exchanged experiences, lessons learned and good practices in relation to the topic, with an emphasis on existing national policy and legislative frameworks and on measures that have delivered concrete results for rural women and girls. They referred to challenges that lie ahead in preventing and responding to gender-based violence against rural women and girls at the national level.

2. The Presidential Councillor for Gender Equality of Colombia, Martha Ordoñez, chaired the first round table and made introductory comments. Ministers and high-level government officials from 18 Member States participated in the first round table. The Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), Aisa Kirabo Kacyira, summarized key messages of the discussion. The Minister for Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs of Qatar, Issa bin Saad al-Jafali al-Nuaimi, chaired the second round table and made introductory comments. Ministers and high-level government officials from 19 Member States

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participated in the second round table. The Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Natalia Kanem, made closing remarks.

Importance of national policy and legislative frameworks as measures to prevent gender-based violence and to ensure effective responses for women and girl survivors

3. Participants discussed the implementation of national strategies and action plans to address different forms of gender-based violence, many of which aim at ensuring access to such comprehensive services as justice, social services and health care, including in rural areas. They outlined their efforts at enhancing coordination across institutions to ensure that all relevant authorities are involved in implementing holistic assistance strategies. Coordinated action between health service providers and judicial authorities were presented as especially important in this regard, and it was underlined that civil society and women's organizations played an essential role in the enhanced delivery of assistance to victims and survivors. A few speakers also noted the role of the private sector.

4. Participants highlighted their efforts to strengthen national legal frameworks so as to align them with international standards, including the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention). Enhancing the protection of women and girls requires laws on specific forms of violence, such as femicide, sexual offences and sexual harassment in public spaces. In order to create better awareness of relevant legislation among the general population and service providers, such laws needed to be widely disseminated and to be made available in local languages. Other steps and good practices towards the elimination of gender-based violence included laws and policies to strengthen women's political participation, to ensure women's land rights and security of tenure and to reduce the gender wage gap. Institutional arrangements should include the establishment of national human rights bodies.

Measures to provide comprehensive services for women and girls

5. Ministers described the availability of comprehensive services for women and girls affected by gender-based violence. Those included one-stop centres and shelters, counselling and psychosocial assistance, adequate health-care services, including for sexual and reproductive health and maternal health, and the extension of coverage to rural areas.

6. Participants affirmed that improving access to justice was critical to the effective reduction of violence against women and girls. The use of hotlines to report violence against women and girls and seek assistance and counselling, the training of police and judges and the strengthening of law enforcement in rural areas were presented as good practices that have closed the gap between victims and the justice system.

Measures to enhance the economic empowerment and financial autonomy of rural women

7. Many participants underlined the importance of the economic empowerment of rural women, especially through ensuring women's economic and financial independence as a means to address gender-based violence.

8. Participants emphasized the importance of recognizing the work and contribution of women in agriculture. They gave examples of how their position in

the economy had been strengthened through access to land, infrastructure and financial services. Measures had been taken to support the economic empowerment of rural women, including through improved access to financial services such as the availability of mobile banking, microcredit and cash transfers for women in rural areas. Targeted efforts had been made to reach women in vulnerable situations and/or facing multiple forms of discrimination.

9. Progress was reported on increasing the rate of women's participation in the labour force and empowering rural women as entrepreneurs, through programmes that provide affordable and accessible childcare services and mentorship schemes.

Challenges in the protection and empowerment of rural women and girls

10. Although participants agreed that much progress had been made in empowering rural women and girls, speakers were concerned that gender-based violence, including political violence against women, was more prevalent among women and girls living in rural areas than among those living in urban areas. Their situation was further exacerbated by limited access to justice, social services and health care. In particular, attention was drawn to the needs of women with disabilities, young women, indigenous women, migrant women, older women, divorced women and women from minority groups, who face additional marginalization. The lack of adequate disaggregated data for rural areas also created challenges in designing effective measures to support the empowerment of women living in those areas and to eliminate the particular disadvantages faced by women in rural areas.

11. Participants recognized that some traditional and cultural beliefs were among the root causes of gender-based violence and constituted barriers for women in reporting such violence and accessing justice. Speakers noted that the challenges required context-specific solutions on issues such as domestic violence, child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation. The importance of engaging men and boys and of addressing negative masculinities was also discussed.

12. Situations of conflict and fragility were mentioned as specific challenges for access to health care, social services and economic opportunity for women and girls living in rural areas.